

VOICES I DIG: SOMETIMES WITH TEARS OF JOY

by Ian Muldoon*

“Music is a mystery. People watch a bunch of people on a stage, making noise in an organised fashion, and for some reason everyone can feel something from it.... What I really want to do is get the room vibrating in a certain way so that everyone experiences something together - something positive, negative, scary or enjoyable. Something real that only being in a room with people making music can do.”

-Chris Potter



Chris Potter: music is a mystery... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

**Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*

“... it’s a very intimate exchange between everyone on stage, giving inspiration and ideas to each other; and the other part that’s magical for me is when the audience is in on it.”

-Dianne Reeves



Dianne Reeves: a very intimate exchange...PHOTO COURTESY TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON

“...most people start with a natural attraction towards music they love or identify with. There are no doubts. Only joy.”

-Kenny Werner



*Kenny Werner:
there are no
doubts. Only
joy...PHOTO
CREDIT CLARA
PEREIRA*



Fats Waller: he has the appetite for all!...

My first musical joy was Fats Waller singing:

*No one to talk with
All by myself
No one to walk with
But I'm happy on the shelf
Ain't misbehavin'
I'm savin' my love for you*

This was *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Waller/Razaf/Brooks). Apart from the sly humour in the Waller voice, his eliding, and his rhythmic power, there was the lyrics' meaning - I was boy alone, all by myself, with no-one to talk to. I was (through no fault of my own!) saving myself for the girl of my dreams! The lyrics also contain these words:

*Like Jack Horner
In the corner
Don't go nowhere
What do I care?
Your kisses are worth waitin' for
Believe me*

When Waller intones in a different register *believe me* with an aural wink, so to speak, and a huge smile, he may be waiting, but you know he's saying what the girl wants to hear, and that he's going to have fun without revealing anything to her.

*I know for certain
The one I love
I'm through with flirtin'
It's just you I'm thinkin' of
Ain't misbehavin'
I'm savin' my love for you!*

And these words (and you need to picture Waller at the piano with receptacle marked “kitty” on the top of the upright, and five or six very attractive smiling women surrounding the pianist and his piano) where he gets to “you” and repeats it for each of the women, looking at them in turn, with a large grin and big wink. He has the appetite for all! Fats Waller and I were conspiring together.



Fats Waller at the piano... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZIZ MAGAZINE

Added to this was the illimitable joy of his inspired pianism which he seemed to spin off without effort. After Waller taught Louis Armstrong this song, and then Armstrong did such a remarkable trumpet solo on it in the 1929 show *Hot Chocolates*, Armstrong was invited out of the pit onto the stage to play it. According to Armstrong this was his big breakthrough moment. “I believe that great song, and the chance I got to play it, did a lot to make me better known all over the country”.

Twenty versions of the tune were recorded in 1929. I have three versions of Waller's recording of it:

New York, 23rd September 1943, Fats Waller, piano.

London, 21st August 1938, *Fats Waller and His Continental Rhythm*, Dave Wilkins, trumpet; George Chisholm, trombone; Alfie Khan, tenor sax; Fats Waller, piano, celeste, organ, vocal; Alan Ferguson, guitar; Len Harrison, string bass; Edmundo Ros, drums.

Hollywood, 23rd January, 1943. Andy Razaf lyrics were included by Waller in this performance in 1943 for the film *Stormy Weather*. Benny Carter, trumpet; Alton Moore, trombone; Gene Porter, clarinet; Fats Waller, piano, vocal; Irving Ashby, guitar; Slam Stewart, bass; and Zutty Singleton, drums.



Waller performing in the film "Stormy Weather"...

The master vocalist Louis Armstrong, who in 1964 knocked the Beatles off the top spot in the hit parade, recorded Waller's song a number of times. An earlier mid-tempo version which opens with muted trumpet followed by a clarinet solo and the vocal including some typical Armstrong scat (19/7/29) is much superior to the 1955 up-tempo version on *Satch Plays Fats* which emphasises humour and the rollicking trombone of Trummy Young.

**The Jazz Standards - A Guide to the Repertoire, Ted Gioia, OUP, New York, 2012, p 5.*

In 1956 Bill Haley's simple thumping rhythms and lyrics of *Rock Around The Clock* - "Put your glad rags on and join me, hon', We'll have some fun when the clock strikes one" - was infantile compared to Waller. Haley was no fool though, and Bill Haley and his Comets recorded a version of *Ain't Misbehavin'* in 1957. Johnny Hartman does a matter-of-fact ironic version of *Ain't Misbehavin'* on his *Unforgettable* (1966). This very fine singer died 15th September 1983 mainly unrecognised, but was sought out by John Coltrane at the height of Coltrane's fame and enticed him to record the magnificent ballad album simply entitled *John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman* (1963, Impulse).



Johnny Hartman (right) pictured here with John Coltrane: Hartman does a matter-of-fact ironic version of "Ain't Misbehavin'" on his "Unforgettable" (1966)... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

Nat King Cole does a romantic wistful ballad interpretation on one of his best and most-loved romantic outings on the document *Love is the Thing* (1957) with arrangements by Gordon Jenkins. Sarah Vaughan with Miles Davis, doing it on *Sarah Vaughan In Hi Fi* (1956), shows her talents at best, where she takes the notes of the horn backing her and incorporates them into the opening of her solo. Count Basie alumnus Helen Humes does an up-tempo, swinging, full-throated, buoyant *Ain't Misbehavin'*, backed by the muted trumpet of Benny Carter, followed by a great trombone solo by Frank Rosolino, a tenor solo by Teddy Edwards, and piano interlude by Andre Previn. Humes does a brief recap backed by the band. This was a very West Coast sextet which included Shelley Manne, drums, and Leroy Vinnegar, bass, recorded in Los Angeles, 5/1/59. Good instance of a voice that could sit well with any group, from the blues, swing, to the cool sounds of the West Coast.



Count Basie alumnus Helen Humes: an up-tempo, swinging, full throated, buoyant “Ain’t Misbehavin’”... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

The Smithsonian Collection of Recordings: The Jazz Singers includes Waller's version of *Until The Real Thing Comes Along* (Chaplin/Nichols/Cahn/Holiner/Freeman) in its collection. R G O’Meally, Professor of Literature, Columbia, NY notes:

[Waller uses] a combination of fake crooner’s lyricism, mock-British posturing, radio melodrama, and Harlem slang asides (to find) a hard kernel of truth beneath the mush of the original lyrics...

It was Waller's mentor James P Johnson who encouraged Waller to “entertain” in order to bring in the dollar.

Thomas Wright Waller (May 21, 1904–December 15, 1943) was a superb pianist who studied with Leopold Godowsky. He had a superior understanding of rhythm. Waller’s complex singing voice - the persona of the jolly fat entertainer masking the torment of the black artist in a racist society - was poignantly engaging, and is reflected in the work of other major artists such as Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday to whom I’ll reference again in this regard further on. This is to say, a tragic figure such as Billie Holiday may have, counterintuitively, her greatest moments in up-tempo “happy” pieces. On the other hand, the “laughing Louis” image of Armstrong may have its greatest

moments in more “serious” works such as *Black and Blue* (Waller/Razaf/Brooks). The individual humanity which the best jazz artists invest into their works is often a complex range of emotions tugging and twisting to and fro, which make these works amazingly rich and powerful experiences to the alert listener.



Major artists such as Louis Armstrong (above left) and Billie Holiday (above right) mask the torment of the black artist in racist society...

Waller, Armstrong, and Holiday are paradigms of these attributes. Waller's *Black and Blue* was recorded a number of times by Louis Armstrong, including on Louis' tribute to Waller *Satch Plays Fats*, and is a telling instance of the joshing, smiling entertainer of *Hello Dolly* giving his best performances on the blues or ballad numbers like *Black And Blue*. Another instance of this is the racist (“niggers all work on the Mississippi” original lyric) and nostalgic *Ol' Man River* (Kern/Hammerstein II) which is turned on its head by a rare and beautiful and wrenching vocal performance by Ray Charles in 1963.

Waller was born into a deeply religious family and was consumed by his musical talent. His obsession with the organ led him in 1927 to record Moszkowski's *Spanish Dance No 1*, Liszt's *Liebesträum*, and Friml's *Spanish Days* on a pipe organ. They have never been released. The organ was his first and main instrumental love. For piano he wrote *Jitterbug Waltz* in ten minutes and *Ain't Misbehavin'* in 45 minutes. His six-part *London Suite* was composed in one hour to fulfil a commitment and thus enable him to leave England. Art Tatum explained: “Fats man, that's where I come from”... adding with a grin “Quite a place to come from”.*

* Robert Gottlieb (ed), “Reading Jazz”, Pantheon Books, New York, 1996, p 400.

Waller also composed the standard *Honeysuckle Rose* (Waller/Razaf).



Art Tatum: “Fats man, that’s where I come from”... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

I had *Honeysuckle Rose* as Side A on a 12” 78rpm with *Blue Turnin’ Grey Over You* (Razaf/Waller) Side B, which I much loved. A classic modern interpretation of *Honeysuckle Rose* was made by Anita O’Day. A 10” Columbia LP I bought featuring Anita O’Day with Roy Eldridge and the Gene Krupa Orchestra, has four

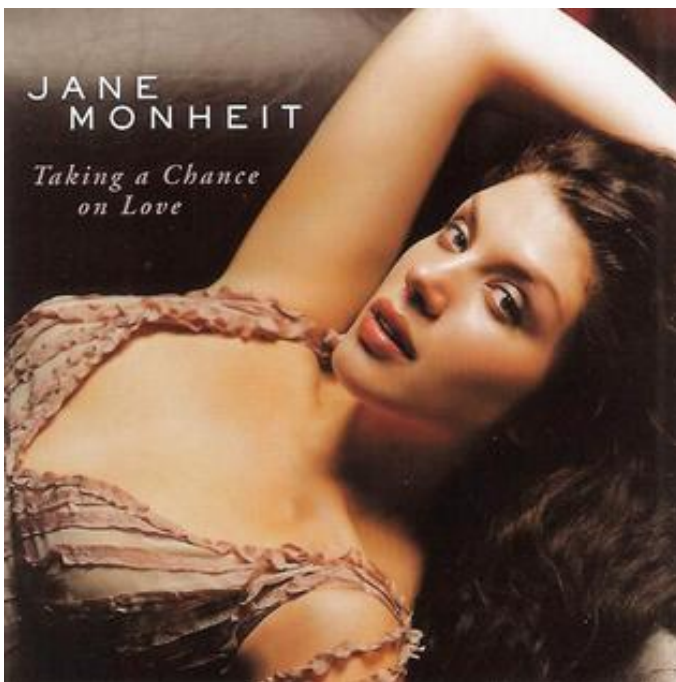
tunes I consider amongst the finest vocal records I've heard. I still listen to them from time to time. The swinging and hip vocal interpretations by O'Day of these strong melodies were made powerful by the brilliant trumpet statements of Eldridge; just to take the break on *Green Eyes* for example, may make your hair stand on end the first time you hear it.



Andy Razaf wrote the lyrics to *Massachusetts* and it was his lyrics and Waller's music that created *Honeysuckle Rose*. It was this song that Anita O'Day made into perhaps her most memorable, with its Joe Mondragan (bass) opening alone backing O'Day. The rhythm section was Paul Smith (piano), Barney Kessel (guitar), Joe Mondragan (bass) and Alvin Stoller (drums). After the up-tempo run through the lyrics, Paul Smith enters with a flourish joined by the guitar and drums, and O'Day repeats the song again in a slightly different way. She then repeats the lyrics again with a yet more percussive approach in conversation with a quartet of trombones. This version of *Honeysuckle Rose* is one of the most memorable, and helped launch Anita O'Day into the second part of her very successful career. The album was called *This Is Anita* and launched the label Verve. O'Day had the ability to rework a melody - speeding up, slowing down, rearranging in a mesmerising and creative way - to make the song fresh and new and hip.



An interesting comparison is with Jane Monheit's version which opens her programme on the document *Taking A Chance On Love* (2004). Like O'Day her up-tempo take has bass only accompaniment by Christian McBride for the first few lines, and she doesn't invest the lyrics with any special nuance -more a lighthearted cheeky version. A nasal quality somewhat detracts from the musical memory one has of this composition, which is a challenge for any musician tackling the classics. For some younger female singers this unfortunate nasal twang seems to accompany attempts at "feeling" when interpreting a lyric.



It's been said of Waller's voice: "He had an excellent light baritone, faultless diction (when he chose) and perfect intonation. Once in a while, he would sing a song almost straight, and the slight delayed rhythmic attack and occasional embellishments revealed his respect for Louis Armstrong, part of whose vocal on a 1932 *When It's Sleepy Time Down South* (Muse/René/René) Waller copies or parodies on the final bridge of *Breakin' The Ice* (Cavanaugh)".*

Waller wrote more than 400 songs, including *Swinga-Dilla Street*; *At Twilight*; *Blue Black Bottom*; *Handful of Keys*; *Minor Drag*; *Harlem Fuss*; *Smashing Thirds*; *I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby*; *Paswonky*; *Keepin' Out Of Mischief Now*; *Yacht Club Swing*; *Squeeze Me* and *I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling*. Louis Armstrong made a tribute album to Waller called *Satch plays Fats* (1955). Contemporary vocalists such as Tierney Sutton in her tribute to Bill Evans *Blue In Green* (2001) opens the document with *Squeeze Me* (Waller/Williams). Chris McNulty does a beautiful eight-minute take on *Jitterbug Waltz* (Waller) on her CD *The Song That Sings You Here* (2012). Waller was a major influence on Art Tatum and Duke Ellington.



Chris McNulty does a beautiful eight-minute take on "Jitterbug Waltz" (Waller) on this CD...

**American Musicians 11-Seventy Two Portraits In Jazz, Whitney Balliett, OUP, NY, 1996, p 77)*

What exactly is a jazz singer? The voice was the first musical instrument, the original, organic musical device, so it's odd to claim a jazz singer is a singer who sings like an instrumentalist. To claim that a jazz singer is one able to improvise choruses of wordless melody on top of chord changes, is to say that Frank Sinatra is no jazz singer, nor are Dinah Shore or Rosemary Clooney, both of whom have both put down credible jazz performances. Johnny Hartman, who is a jazz singer and recorded a stunning document with John Coltrane, demurred from that description and wanted to be known as an "all-round" singer. Norah Jones similarly is one who prefers not to be typecast. In other words, even when Louis Armstrong sings the most trite lyrics, he's always a jazz singer. Bing Crosby on the other hand can drift back and forth between jazz and popular song at will. Frankie Laine, most familiar to country and western fans, did *Jazz Spectacular* (1955) with Buck Clayton and band. Sammy Davis Jr moving into scat when performing *Love Me Or Leave Me* (Donaldson/Kahn) does not make him a jazz singer. Nina Simone, not using scat on her version of the same song, does not thereby stop being a jazz singer.



Frankie Laine & Buck Clayton's album "Jazz Spectacular"...

The narrow definition then is that a jazz singer is a singer who uses their voice like a musical instrument played by a jazz player. My preferred definition is if the singer sounds like a jazz singer to me, then they're a jazz singer. Frank Sinatra who honed his skills with the big band of Tommy Dorsey, was influenced by Louis Armstrong and frequently performed with jazz musicians including those studio performers working in the bands of the likes of Nelson Riddle, may not meet the criteria of the narrow definition of jazz singer, but please note he does appear in *The Smithsonian Collection of Jazz Singers*.

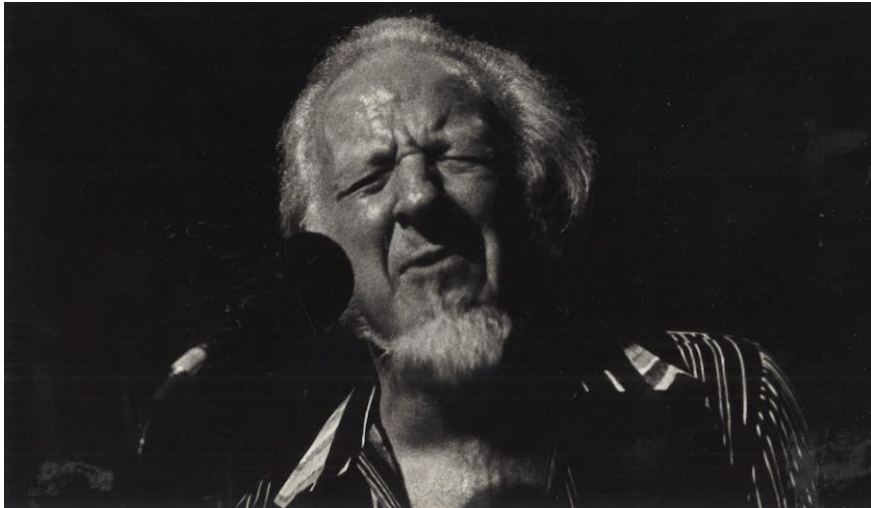
In the beginning of jazz, instrumentalists, cornet players, clarinet players, trombone players, often tried to imitate the voice. Singers in turn often tried to imitate instruments. On Bessie Smith's *Reckless Blues* (1925) Louis Armstrong's cornet is a second voice. But some of the works of Frank Sinatra are prime examples of one of the greatest periods in musical history which arose out of the one of the great moments in history: the American Revolution. For the first time in human history peoples were breaking away from the political models of old, away from monarchy and tyranny, to establish democratic institutions based on the will of the people. For example, in 1777 Vermont declared itself a republic in Windsor and adopted the world's first Constitution, with universal male suffrage, public schools, and abolition of slavery. In America the African diaspora and the Jewish diaspora came together musically in the first half of the twentieth century to create the greatest musical revolution ever: the emergence of jazz, a music created out of the living experiences of the people and their struggles to be free, who absorbed, listened, adapted and created jazz. But it's not just "folk" music. As Harry Edison explains: "It's too hard to play!"



Harry "Sweets" Edison: it's not just 'folk' music; it's too hard to play... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

The so-called Great American Songbook is a dismissive shorthand which hardly does credit to the art created by the likes of Irving Berlin, Harold Arlen, Sammy Cahn, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Hoagy Carmichael, Burton Lane, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Oscar Hammerstein, Cole Porter and perhaps the greatest musician of the 20th century, Edward Kennedy Ellington. These great musicians made art just as Mozart made art, but starting in poverty in a marketplace of music, music halls, brothels, street singers and whatnot, it couldn't be art really, could it, coming from ordinary people, coming from the streets? Their refrain was "We're just trying to make a buck." But art it truly was.

The voice as instrument, like any instrument, is more powerful when used in the context of song or theme structure (cf *Hope In My Pocket*, Kristin Berardi, ABC, 2015) than it is as pure sound. Even the very greatest instrumentalists such as Sonny Rollins, can wander and meander ineffectually as he does occasionally on the 37-minute *Oleo* at the Village Gate in 1962 with Don Cherry. Similarly, bebop vocal improvisation or scatting has an appeal up to a point - even for such as Joe 'Bebop' Lane.



Joe Lane: bebop vocal improvisation or scatting has an appeal up to a point... PHOTO CREDIT PETER SINCLAIR

Thus Duke Ellington, perhaps as much as any other artist, has provided strong, beautiful and memorable melodies and compositions, arrangements and voicings, which stand as brilliant models of structure for musicians to explore or interpret or use as lifting off points, to the extent that many of the greatest examples of modern music where the voice is used as a solo instrument are based on Ellington's work. It is with this artist that my exposure to jazz singers began with *Creole Love Call*. And it is to this artist that many jazz singers turn for some of their greatest works.



Duke Ellington in 1963: many jazz singers turn to him for some of their greatest works... PHOTO COURTESY GETTY IMAGES

Adelaide Hall is best-known as a concert singer, or stage show singer. In 1974 Hall sang *Creole Love Call* at Ellington's memorial service at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, London. But in the beginning of her journey Adelaide Hall was on stage in the wings of the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, listening to Duke Ellington's famous Washingtonians and the Royal Balalaika Orchestra rehearsing a 1927 show called *Jazzmania*. The band members were rehearsing the instrumental *Creole Love Call* (Ellington/Miley/Jackson) which is based on King Oliver's *Camp Meeting Blues*, and Hall began humming along. Ellington heard Hall and approached her exclaiming, "That's just what I was looking for. Can you do it again?" Hall replied she couldn't because she didn't know what she was doing. Ellington begged! To Ellington's delight Hall sang the counter melody, and two days later she joined the Ellington band for a recording session.



Adelaide Hall: she sang "Creole Love Call" at Ellington's memorial service at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, London, in 1974... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Creole Love Call (Ellington/Miley/Jackson) was recorded on Wednesday, 26/1/27 and featured the wordless vocal of Adelaide Hall. On first hearing it, one's hair may rise. This was both Ellington's and Hall's first international hit. I realised that jazz singers were not just those who stood up when it was their turn to sing when a song with words was being played - they were another band instrument.

The track begins with strong mid-tempo rhythm and a chorus of horns over which Hall "moans", segueing into a trumpet-like growl which is then taken over by an actual trumpet growl by Bubber Miley, who starts to sound like Hall's opening moan. A distant clarinet replies. The band then echoes the theme which is replied to by the horns. A high-pitched reed chorus follows, answered by percussion. Hall returns in a wordless conversation sounding like a trumpet, and closes the piece.

Creole Love Call must have been influential, but Adelaide Hall moved to England in 1938 where she thrived until her death on 7 November 1993, aged 92, at London's Charing Cross Hospital. In 1941, Hall replaced Gracie Fields as Britain's highest paid female entertainer.

After Hall's effort in 1927, Ellington recorded *The Mooche* (Ellington/Mills) on 1st October 1928 with Gertrude 'Baby' Cox providing a wordless vocal. It too became justifiably famous. Cox vocalises so effectively as another instrument, so to speak, her solo became synonymous with the piece to the extent that future interpretations would copy phrases the way phrases of Charlie Parker et al are copied by modernists.



Gertrude 'Baby' Cox: she provided a wordless vocal for Ellington's "The Mooche"...

The opening has a strong high register reeds chorus with the trumpets growling in response, and a mid-tempo thumping rhythm. The whole orchestra makes a statement of the (uplifting) theme. A clarinet enters with a banjo plucking in response. The brilliant gurgling Baby Cox voice enters, sounding like a trumpet's lighter growl. She does a solo over the banjo which makes one want to yell in delight. Bubber Miley answers, over a distant clarinet and rhythm. A band chorus follows. The band descends quietly to a conclusion, with the Miley trumpet growling gently in the background.

But Adelaide Hall had set the precedent. She may not be revered as she should be in her land of birth, because she emigrated to England, but it should be noted that the greatest musicians recorded with her, including Art Tatum, Fats Waller, and Duke Ellington.

In the period 1932 to 1940, vocalists who recorded with Ellington include Sonny Greer, Bing Crosby, Ray Mitchell, Ethel Waters, Scat Powell, Jean Eldridge, Bill Strayhorn, Buddy Clark, Sue Mitchell, Jerry Kruger, Mary McHugh, Leon Lafell, Jean Eldridge, and The Quintones, but especially Ivie Anderson. Anderson may be heard singing on *It Don't Mean A Thing* (Ellington/Mills); *Delta Bound* (Alex Hill); *Truckin'* (Bloom/Koehler); *Dinah Lou* (Bloom/Dale/Koehler); *Shoe Shine Boy* (Cahn/Chaplin); *There's A Lull In My Life* (Gordon/Revel); *Alabama Home* (Ellington/Ringle); and *Mood Indigo* (Ellington/Bigard), *Stormy Weather* (Arlen/Koehler) and *Solitude* (Ellington/Mills/DeLange).

Throughout the 1930s, Ivie Anderson was recognised as the singer on a string of Ellington's most popular releases, especially including *It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* (Ellington/Mills) which features her scating, and which was her recording debut for Ellington on 2nd February 1932. She stayed with Ellington for over ten years. She is generally thought of as Ellington's finest voice. When Anderson left, several other female vocalists filled the void including Joya Sherrill (who sang with Ellington mostly during the War years), Dolores Parker, Yvonne Lanauze, and Betty Roche.



Ivie Anderson, performing with the Ellington band in 1935: generally thought of as Ellington's finest voice...

Ethel Waters did a memorable version of *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* (Fields/McHugh) 22/12/32 with the Ellington Orchestra with the eight-line introduction backed by Ellington's piano alone, then with the orchestra entering on the main verse. The tune was first introduced by Adelaide Hall in the 1928 musical *Blackbirds of 1928*, but Ethel Waters made it her own. Waters is credited with being the first important voice in fusing popular song and jazz (bringing together white and black audiences if you will) through her interpretations of *Dinah* (Akst/Lewis/Young) which she introduced in 1925; *Memories of You* (Razaf/Blake, 1930); *Stormy Weather* (Arlen/Koehler) which she introduced at the Cotton Club in 1933; and three songs written especially for her by Irving Berlin: *Heat Wave*, *Harlem on my Mind* and especially *Supper Time*, which is about a wife's reaction to news of her husband's lynching. The song was introduced by Ethel Waters in 1933. Waters was the impoverished daughter of a 13-year old rape victim, and she escaped her surroundings through imitating actors and singers. In her first stage appearance in 1917 aged 20, she sang *St Louis Blues* (Handy). She was a major influence on Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald. Her life's experiences and indomitable nature gave her voice a power and authenticity tinged with hope, that inspired many artists, especially jazz singers.



Ethel Waters: her life's experiences and indomitable nature gave her voice a power and authenticity tinged with hope that inspired many artists...

For a fine instance of a modern vocalist interpreting Ellington's work in the tradition of Adelaide Hall on her *Creole Love Call*, Jane Monheit provides two examples on her CD *The Songbook Sessions*, Emerald City Records (2016). The first is *All Too Soon* (Ellington/Sigman). The bass opens proceedings *adagio*. Congas provide a pattern, and an electric piano enters, then Monheit solos over the rhythm like a horn, drawing out the lyrics with inter alia the line "our love deserves another try" in long expressive notes. Nicholas Payton plays a trumpet solo and the piece ends on a wordless vocal. *Chelsea Mood* is a medley of *Chelsea Bridge* (Strayhorn) and *In A Sentimental Mood* (Ellington/Kurtz/Mills). It has a wordless *largo* opening and continues in a duet with the trumpet. The piano enters and the trumpet solos. At about two minutes the lyrics are sung. The piece concludes with a duet between the voice and the horn which at one moment sounds like a trombone, another a flugelhorn, finally, a trumpet but in the sweetest way.



Jane Monheit: interpreting Ellington's work in the tradition of Adelaide Hall on her "Creole Love Call"...

Peter Eldridge, Lauren Kinhan, Darmon Meader, Kim Nazarian as New York Voices on *Reminiscing in Tempo* (2019) Origin, do the title track by Ellington/Tormé with four voices.

Another musically beautiful instance of wordless voice is evident on Andrea Keller's *Angels and Rascals* (2005) with Andrea Keller, piano; Eugene Ball, trumpet; Ian Whitehurst, tenor saxophone; Danny Fischer, drums; Shannon Barnett, trombone; and Gian Slater, voice. An outstanding example is the wordless vocal on the up-tempo piece *2010* (Keller) in harmony with the trombone. An interesting comparison too is the 7'49" ballad *Resting Place* (Keller) where the tenor and trumpet in tone and sounds during solos, seem indistinguishable from Slater's voice which is not featured on this track. Eerie and beautiful. Silence is also used to powerful effect. On the piece *Machine Gun Piano* (Keller) the sweet and beautiful harmony between trombone and voice in conversation with the saxophone, is another telling example of jazz voice used to impressive musical effect.



On Barney McAll's varied programme of music on the document *Hearing The Blood* (2017) Gian Slater is featured voicing a lullaby *Echoless Shore* (McAll/Sawyer). She also appears on Ben Monder's *Hydra* (2013) where she contributes voice to a track called *Elysium* (Monder), described as "a memorable, ghostly melody". She is also featured on *Postlude*. Further evidence, if any should be needed, of Slater's world standing amongst current jazz masters. Lisa Gerrard and Gian Slater are part of the tradition in jazz established by Adelaide Hall. Gerrard, though not a jazz singer, has used wordless vocal in such films as *Whale Rider*, *The Insider* (1999) and *Burning Man* (2011) for which she won the awards for Australian Film Critics Best Music Score, and Australian Screen Music Award Feature Film Score of the Year.



Lisa Gerrard (above) and Gian Slater (below) are part of the tradition in jazz established by Adelaide Hall...



Dominique Eade does a wordless vocal improvisation of a tone row composed by Gunther Schuller on *Town And Country* (2017) Sunnyside. She does a brilliant take on *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)* (Dylan). This document is a superb programme of 18 pieces with Eade's voice and the piano of Ran Blake - quirky, original and deeply musical.

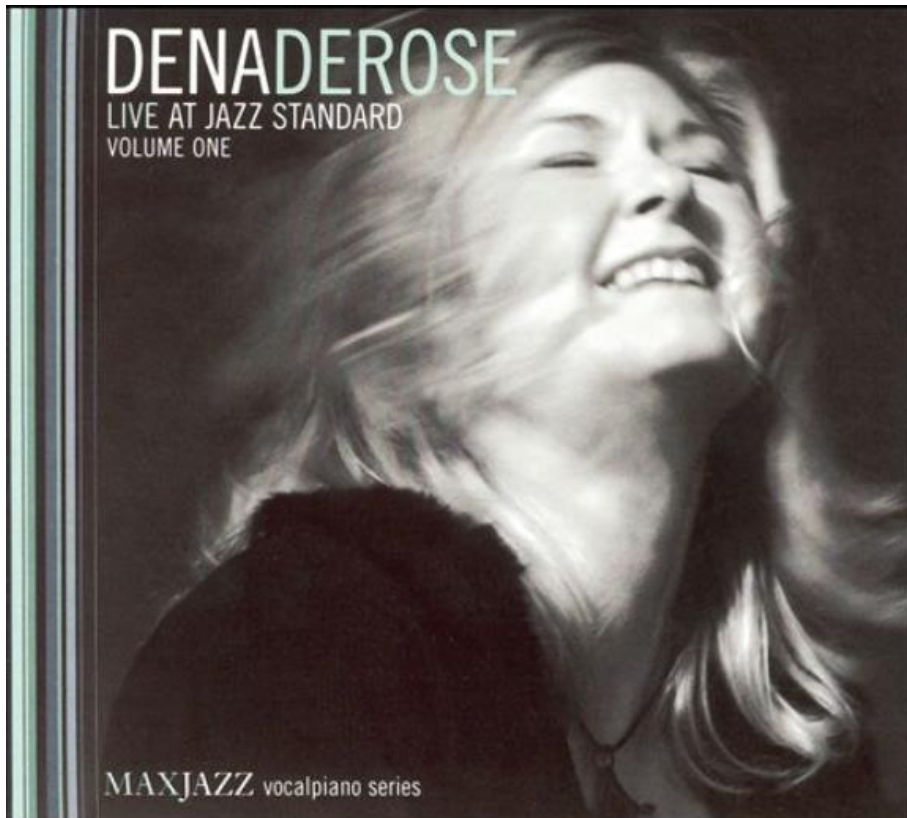
An excellent instance of the instrumentalist using her voice as wordless instrument is pianist Marilyn Crispell in the opening to her *Area/Solstice* (Crispell) composition on the document *Live In Zurich* (1989,

Leo), with Paul Motian, drums and Reggie Workman, bass. Another is Kristin Berardi who composed all the works on the document *Hope In My Pocket*, (2015, ABC), and is one of four musicians appearing: Berardi, voice; Sean Foran, piano; Rafael Karlen, tenor saxophone; and John Parker, percussion. The programme of music has themes of memory, war, loss, including *Seperation (sic)*, *Broken Landscape*, *Wound*, and *A Mother's Plea*. The simple lyrics are brought to life by Berardi. Ms Berardi translated ANZAC letters into musical concepts. Some mid-tempo uplifting lighter pieces lift the mood: *Hope In My Pocket*, *For How Long?* and *I Picture You*. The programme is notable for wordless vocals and some quite fine harmony between saxophone and voice on *Broken Landscape*; between piano and voice on *I Picture You*; and between piano and saxophone on *Seperation(sic)*. Berardi is particularly effective on ballads. It's an excellent example of the voice as an instrumentalist, part of a quartet. The Shigero Grand Piano is very well recorded at the Queensland Multicultural Centre, June 2015.



L-R, Kristin Berardi (vocals), Sean Foran (piano), Rafael Karlen (tenor saxophone): Berardi's is an excellent example of the voice as an instrumentalist, part of a quartet...

Another example of instrument and voice harmony is the outstanding Dena DeRose on her *Live at Jazz Standard Volume 1 & 2* (Maxjazz, 2007). DeRose has been the Vocal Professor and Head of Jazz Vocals at the University of Music and Dramatic Arts in Graz, Austria, since 2006. She is an exceptionally fine pianist and vocalist, which makes a formidable combination. To my ear her *Jazz Standard* documents are among the finer live documents of jazz voice in recent memory. Her work makes that of Diana Krall seem like a cocktail pianist and singer and puts in stark relief the problematic challenge of young singers tackling the classics.



*Dena DeRose:
Her work
makes that of
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pianist and
singer...*

An example of the latter is Cyrille Aimee, whose *It's A Good Day* (Mack Avenue, 2014) has an up-tempo *Caravan* (Ellington/Tizol) which just doesn't work, and *Where Or When* (Rodgers and Hart) which seems insipid and childlike. On the other hand she does a very fine wordless scat on Oscar Pettiford's *Tricotism* supported only by Sam Anning's strong double bass performance. But a light nasal twang is lurking not too far away.

On the other hand Dena DeRose clearly takes great care with her choice of material, which is usually much more melodically complicated and harmonically interesting, and she makes standards her own such as *I Fall In Love Too Easily* (Styne/Cahn) which, in a dramatic conversation with bassist Martin Wind, rivals Betty Carter's version (*Betty Carter Live at The Village Vanguard 1970*) and Cassandra Wilson's (*Blue Skies 1988*). It's a 6'21" *tour de force* of musical intelligence, power and collective creativity of the highest order. At one point she goes "mmmmmm?" and the bass replies "uuuuuh huuu" musically. There are two hours of performances on the documents with DeRose piano, voice, arrangements, production; Martin Wind, bass; and Matt Wilson, drums. Joel Frahm appears on *I Fall In Love Too Easily* (first version) volume one. Some highlights include her harmonising scatting with her piano on *Detour Ahead* (Carter/Ellis/Frigo) and *Laughing At Life* (Kenny/Kenny/Todd). The programme also includes *The Ruby and the Pearl* (Evans/Livingston), *In Your Own Sweet Way* (Brubeck), *Get Out Of Town* (Porter), and *Green Dolphin Street* (Kaper/Washington). Where Slam Stewart used to hum along with arco bass meanderings, sometimes with humour, DeRose is masterful with her wider range, and warm and sparkling voice harmonising with her pianism improvisations.

An early standout recollection of the marrying of a great jazz vocalist with a great Ellington work was *The Blues* (Ellington) on the LP *Mel Tormé and the Marty Paich Dek-Tette* (1956). I say this because this was an album to knock your sox off, with arrangements and soloists that were among the best in jazz, featuring works by a range of great composers including Harry Warren, Harold Arlen, George Gershwin, Vincent Youmans, and Richard Rodgers. George Shearing's *Lullaby of Birdland* was an up-tempo masterpiece of swing and arranging, but *The Blues* was the composition that remains imbedded as the most memorable.



This Mel Tormé and Marty Paich album was one to knock your sox off...

One of the most memorable big band vocal albums of all is *Presenting Joe Williams and The Thad Jones Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra* (1996 Blue Note Reissue) in which Williams does slow Ellington, *Come Sunday*, and swinging Ellington, *It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* out of a total of 12 tracks.

Nina Simone made a mid-tempo *Mood Indigo* (Ellington/Barnard/Mills) her own, and did versions of *Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me* (Russel/Ellington); *I Got It Bad* (Webster/Ellington); *Hey, Buddy Bolden* (Ellington/Strayhorn); *Solitude* (DeLange/Mills/Ellington); and *That Gal From Joe's* (Mills/Ellington) on *The Colpix Years Anthology* (Rhino, 1996).



Nina Simone (above) made a mid-tempo “Mood Indigo” her own... PHOTO COURTESY TWITTER

Sarah Vaughan made 1954 magic out of *Prelude to a Kiss* (Ellington/Mills) on one of her finest small group albums *Swingin' Easy* (1992 reissue). Perhaps Frank Sinatra's finest ballad album is *In The Wee Small Hours* (1955) which features a quintet rhythm section of Bill Miller, piano; George Van Eps, rhythm guitar; Phil Stephens, bass; Alvin Stoller, drums; and Paul Smith on celeste, augmented from time to time by a string section. The major exception is Harry 'Sweets' Edison who plays on *Mood Indigo* (Ellington/Bigard) which song National Public Radio included in its list of the 100 most important recordings in America in the 20th century. The Edison solo would later be expanded into the background riff for Sinatra's hit *Witchcraft*. Arrangements were by Nelson Riddle. Riddle's role model was Duke Ellington. On Sinatra's most revered up-tempo album *A Swingin' Affair!* (1957), *I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)* (Ellington/Webster) is a standout.



Sinatra's album "In The Wee Small Hours": his version of "Mood Indigo" on this album is regarded by National Public Radio as one of the 100 most important recordings in America in the 20th century...

On her document *Just As You Are* (2016) Kristin Berardi does a languid mid-tempo opening on *Just Squeeze Me* (Ellington/Gaines) backed only by Brett Hirst on bass, and Tim Firth on drums. Carl Morgan drops in on guitar at the beginning of the third stanza when Berardi's tone gets more chirpy and up-tempo. On the last four lines she slows seductively, squeezes out "ecstasy" and finishes the final line as Greg Coffin's piano stomps in. Berardi invests meaning and drama into the lyric. The second run through is looser, some scatting, up-tempo, more instrumental. The final run through is more of a romp for all.



Kristin Berardi: she invests meaning and drama into the lyric...PHOTO COURTESY LOUDMOUTH

The piano and voice of Sarah McKenzie in her document *We Could Be Lovers* (2014) of 11 songs which she arranged, her up-tempo take on *Love You Madly* (Ellington) is a ripper. The first two four-line stanzas are backed just by the drums of Marco Valeri, the third stanza she joins in with piano, and the final stanza drums back her only. Warren Wolf then does a standout vibraphone solo, with the guitar of Hugh Stuckey comping, bass and drums solo in conversation, band then swings in chorus, McKenzie contributes a piano solo, and ends with a repeat vocal in a swaggeringly fine conclusion. Incidentally, the great trumpet player Ingrid Jensen appears on three tracks of this impressive outing. On her 2012 release *Close Your Eyes*, she takes a turn on *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* (Ellington/Russell) which she arranged, and does an up-tempo big band tentette bash with voice on the number.



Sarah McKenzie: her up-tempo take on Ellington's "Love You Madly" is a ripper...

Canadian Carol Westman on her document *Alone Together* (Welcar, 2015), interprets the ballad *I Didn't Know About You* (Ellington/Russell) accompanying herself on piano, but is joined mid-song by Jay Azzolina, guitar; and then Rufus Reid, bass. She solos on piano. Her rounded voice makes the most of the strong Ellington melody. Westman's grandfather founded the Toronto Symphony Orchestra; her parents taught her and her three siblings to play most of the 15 instruments in the home. Her father took her to a Duke Ellington concert at the age of 12. She started on piano at five years and went to Berklee College Of Music, Boston to study jazz piano, composition and arranging. She produced *Alone Together* for her own label and arranged all songs.

An uplifting and swinging mid-tempo *Long, Strong, and Consecutive* (Ellington/David) is a reworking by Catherine Russell of a song first introduced by Joya Sherrill and the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1945. It has wit and female strength that must have relevance for the strong woman of the 21st Century, and is one of 11 terrific selections on her *Inside the Heart of Mine* (World Village, 2010). Sample lyrics:

*Kiss me long, strong and consecutive,
No short snort will suit me, Jack
Long, strong and consecutive
Hold me strong like aces back to back.*



Catherine Russell: an uplifting and swinging mid-tempo version of Ellington's "Long, Strong, and Consecutive"...

Ms Russell is given support with a solid guitar solo and backing by Matt Munisteri, and Lee Hudson on bass. The programme includes Fats Waller's *Inside The Heart of Mine*, *Troubled Waters* (Coslow/Johnston) and *Spoonful* (Willie Dixon).

Billie Holiday backed by the Duke Ellington Orchestra on 12th March 1935 recorded *Saddest Tale* (Ellington/Mills). Her version of *Solitude* (DeLange/Ellington/Mills) with the Teddy Wilson Orchestra recorded 9/5/41 is one for the ages. Johnny Hartman recorded *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart* (Nemo/Mills/Ellington/Redmond) in Dec 49 and *Lush Life* (Strayhorn) in March 63. Billy Eckstine recorded *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* (Ellington/Russell) 29/12/53; *Caravan* (Ellington/Yizol/Mills) 17/12/48; and with the Pied Pipers, *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* (Ellington/Russell) 29/12/53.



Billie Holiday: her version of “Solitude” (DeLange/Ellington/Mills) with the Teddy Wilson Orchestra recorded 9/5/41 is one for the ages...

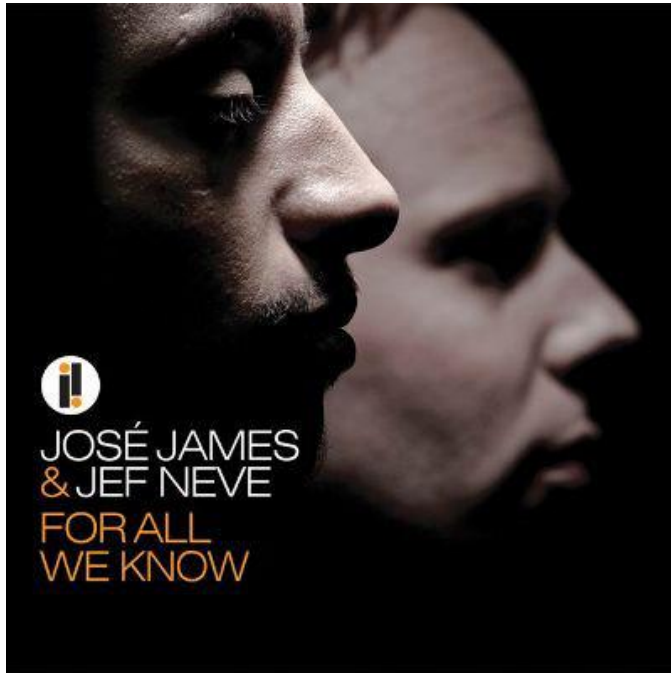
Andy Bey has a four-octave baritone voice which he combines with the technical achievement of having mastered *pasagio*, the chest mix of head and chest voice. He has delivered memorable Ellington on his *Ballads, Blues & Bey* (1996) with *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart* (Ellington/Nemo/Mills/Redmond); *In A Sentimental Mood* (Ellington/Mills); *I’m Just A Lucky So And So* (Ellington/David); and *Day Dream* (Strayhorn/Ellington/Latouche) on which album he says he channels Johnny Hodges and Paul Gonsalves. He also does an up-tempo *Caravan* (Tizol/Ellington).

Nat King Cole also does *Caravan* with the composer Juan Tizol soloing, on *The Complete After Midnight Sessions* (1987 reissue), considered one of Cole's most distinguished albums out of the hundreds he produced. Cole also did *I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)* (Ellington/Webster) with the George Shearing Quintet (2000 reissue); and the rare *Ebony Rhapsody* (Ellington) from the album *Let's Face The Music* (1964).



Nat King Cole did versions of Ellington's "Caravan", "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)" and the rare "Ebony Rhapsody"... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ REFLECTIONS

In 2010 José James's light baritone, accompanied by pianist Jef Neve, recorded *Just Squeeze Me* (Ellington/Gaines) and *Lush Life* (Strayhorn) released on the document *For All We Know* (Verve/Impulse). The former opens with a hand drawn across the darker piano strings which presages a largo tempo piano solo of impressive sensitivity. James gives an intimate vocal interpretation of the classic song.



On this album José James gives an intimate vocal interpretation of the classic “Just Squeeze Me”...

In film, Dianne Reeves in the George Clooney directed *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005) does *Solitude* (DeLange/Ellington/Mills) with Matt Catingub on tenor; Peter Martin, piano; Jeff Hamilton, drums and Robert Hurst bass. Reeves shows her up-tempo chops in sterling company on *Cherokee* (Noble) with Bobby Watson, alto; Kenny Barron, piano; Rodney Whitaker, bass and Herlin Riley, drums, on her document *The Grand Encounter* (Blue Note) 1996.



Dianne Reeves, as she appeared in the George Clooney directed movie “Good Night And Good Luck”...

Cassandra Wilson does a typically idiosyncratic whispering vocal on *Caravan* (Tizol/Ellington) at mid-tempo, against a rhythmic backdrop in double time, on her *Loverly* (2008) with Yoruba percussionist Lekan Babalola, and Marvin Sewell, guitar; Lonnie Plaxico, bass; Jason Moran, piano; and Herlin Riley, drums.



Cassandra Wilson: a typically idiosyncratic, whispering vocal version of "Caravan" at mid-tempo against a rhythmic backdrop in double time... PHOTO CREDIT JOANNE SAVIO

Kurt Elling redraws *Prelude to a Kiss* (Ellington/Gordon) on *The Messenger* (Blue Note, 1997), which begins with unaccompanied tenor by Eddie Johnson, joined by Laurence Hobgood, with a run through of the song. Elling then enters like another saxophone and interacts with Johnson. Duke Ellington would surely approve.



Kurt Elling: on his 1997 Blue Note album “The Messenger” he redraws Ellington’s “Prelude to a Kiss”... PHOTO COURTESY MELBOURNE JAZZ CO-OPERATIVE

The Ellington/Sigman tune *All Too Soon* is given an intimate ballad treatment by Tierney Sutton with great support by two guitars: Serge Merlaud, acoustic guitar; and Kevin Axt on acoustic bass guitar, on Sutton’s *Paris Sessions* (2014) BFM Jazz.

One of the major documents is *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Duke Ellington Songbook* (Essential Jazz Classics 2CDs, 1957). The first CD is the complete small group sides which feature Ben Webster, and was recorded in Hollywood 17/10/57. One highlight among many is the harmony between voice, Webster’s tenor and Stuff Smith’s violin on *Just Squeeze Me (But Don’t Tease Me)* (Ellington/Gaines). There are 19 Ellington compositions in the programme.



Duke Ellington & Ella Fitzgerald: did Ellington really want to be playing, literally and metaphorically, second fiddle to a singer?...

The second CD is the Duke Ellington Orchestra but this programme is somewhat controversial. It was the coming together of two major figures which may be another instance of the potential for problems between producer and artist. Both Norman Granz and Duke Ellington were major figures in their respective fields in 1957 and the coming together of both was a dream project. But in 1979 Norman Granz explained:

It was done under the worst conditions. (Ellington) was under contract to Columbia, but I had Johnny Hodges. When Hodges rejoined the band in 1956, I managed to force a few concessions. I would have Duke for one LP, two if I used Ella. We planned far in advance, but in the end Duke failed to do a single arrangement. Ella had to use the band's regular arrangements. She'd do a vocal where an instrumental chorus would normally go. To stretch to four LPs, we padded it with various small-group things with Ben Webster and so on. On some tracks with the full orchestra, Ella improvises over standard Ellington arrangements in place of an Ellington vocalist or instrumentalist. Only on a couple of tracks does Ellington actually manage to provide a couple of new arrangements in the session, such as "Caravan". But although it is an interesting album, it does have a feel of muddling through, and if some numbers were 'all right on the night' so to speak, others are merely fillers. Once again, as with the Porter album, there is a feeling of what might have been. For this reason it is impossible not to listen to some tracks and wonder how things might have turned out had Duke prepared for the session as he did just a few years later for his latter-day masterpieces such as "And His Mother Called Him Bill" and "The Far East Suite". But Ellington worked in strange and obscure ways.

Did he really want to prepare for the session? Did he really want to be playing, literally and metaphorically, second fiddle to a singer? An intensely proud and dignified man, Ellington did not like playing the role of second banana to anyone, and on the Duke Ellington Songbook it showed.’ (from notes by Mark Mayer to the 2009 Essential Jazz Classics 2CD release).

Bearing in mind Granz had 40 years experience in listening, organising Jazz At The Philharmonic Concerts, and producing some of the greatest documents in the music, including the songbook series for Ella Fitzgerald, what *does* work on the Ellington Songbook production is better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick, so to speak. Even if Fitzgerald’s take on *Lush Life* is a disappointment (was gloom and misery ever her forte?) she provides the first vocal ever on *Rockin’ In Rhythm* (Ellington/Carney); she does *Take The A Train* (Strayhorn) and provides some signature scatting over a romping rhythm section. Great stuff. Gillespie replies! Cat Anderson answers! Ray Nance answers! Clark Terry answers! Short Baker answers! Willie Cook answers! Johnny Hodges is in full flight on *I Ain’t Got Nothin’ But The Blues* (Ellington/George), with Ella doing a sly and witty rendition. In jazz voice it’s the coming together of two of the masters of 20th century music.



Norman Granz (left) pictured with Ella Fitzgerald: in the end Duke failed to do a single arrangement. Ella had to use the band’s regular arrangements. She’d do a vocal where an instrumental chorus would normally go...

The Oxford Companion To Jazz (OUP, New York, 2000) comments on Fitzgerald:

*Ella's voice alone could have earned her supremacy. Her intuitive rhythm and improvisations came from so deeply within that she could neither be imitated or challenged. Above all, she translated notes, refrains, and even the pain of her early life, possibly through a musical mask, into joyousness for her listeners. Ella did not sing sad songs. Lyrics might lament an imperfect romance, but even the bitterest became delectable in her sunny, clear, warm caress. She did not originate but may have perfected scat, the often eloquent substitution of whimsical, extemporaneous, and occasionally onomatopoeic syllables for written melody and words or absence of words. Ella's scat thesaurus was an orchestra of instrumental timbres.**



*Ella Fitzgerald,
performing at Ronnie
Scott's in London: she did
not originate but may
have perfected scat...*

*Patricia Willard, "Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, and Billie Holiday", *Oxford Companion*, *ibid*, p 239.

Not infrequently I listen to opera in the background as I read the morning paper. Artists such as Edith Mathis, Kirsten Flagstad, Leo Nucci, Brigitte Fassbaender, Maria Callas, Virginia Zeani, and Renata Tebaldi are among my chosen artists. But for pleasure and deep listening Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and other great jazz voices are preferred. I am not alone in this. The British pianist Gerald Moore had accompanied the great lieder singer Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau at a recital in Washington DC. As told by Moore, at the end of the recital, Fischer-Dieskau rushed off stage and direct to the airport for a flight to New York to attend Carnegie Hall for a Duke Ellington concert featuring Ella Fitzgerald.



German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau: he rushed off stage and direct to the airport for a flight to New York to attend Carnegie Hall for a Duke Ellington concert featuring Ella Fitzgerald... PHOTO CREDIT JEAN-REGIS ROUSTON

Fischer-Dieskau explained that it was a rare opportunity to hear two of the greatest 20th Century artists together. He was aware too that, with a singer such as Fitzgerald or Holiday or Vaughan, the listener was getting the equivalent of two for one: each was a composer in their own right whenever they extemporised on a given work. Additionally Fitzgerald, unlike Ellington, had never ventured into classical or third stream music as had Ellington. It was a unique opportunity.

It's interesting that Ella Fitzgerald is sometimes compared less favourably to Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan. On the other hand, she is considered by some to be the "perfect jazz vocalist." Henry Pleasants demurs by suggesting her vocalism is less than perfect but "ingenious and resourceful" and, like other great singers, she has worked out ways to turn them into assets. He explains:

She commands, in public performance and on record an extraordinary range of two octaves and a sixth, from the low D or D-flat to the high B-flat and possibly higher. This is a greater range, especially at the bottom, than is required or expected of most opera singers. But there is a catch to it. Opera singers, as they approach the 'passage', depress the larynx and open the throat - somewhat

*as in yawning and, focusing the tone in the head, soar on upward. The best of them master the knack of preserving, as they enter the upper register, the natural colour and timbre of the normal middle register, bringing to the upper notes a far greater weight of voice than Ella Fitzgerald does. Even the floated pianissimo head tones of, say, Montserrat Caballe should not be confused with the tones that Ella produces at the upper extremes of her range. Ella does not depress the larynx, or 'cover', as she approaches the 'passage'. She either eases off, conceding in weight of breath and muscular control what a recalcitrant vocal apparatus will not accommodate, or she brazens through it accepting the all too evident muscular strain. From this she is released as she emerged upward into a free-floating falsetto. She does not, in other words, so much pass from one register to another as from one voice to another. As Roberta Flack has noted perceptively 'Ella doesn't shift gears. She goes from lower to higher register the same all the way through'.**



Roberta Flack (left) says that 'Ella doesn't shift gears. She goes from lower to higher register the same all the way through'...

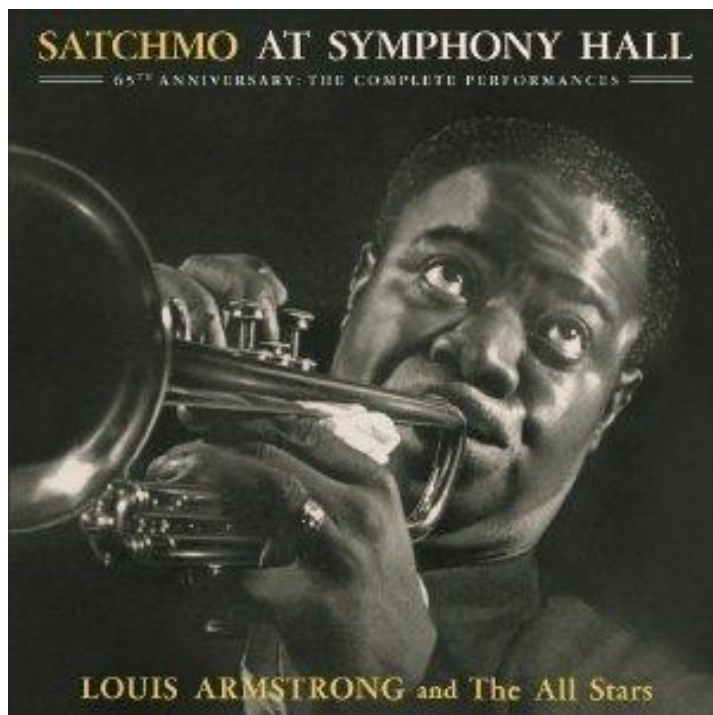
* Robert Gottlieb (ed), "Reading Jazz: A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism From 1919 To Now", Pantheon Books, New York, 1996, p 979.

Consider *The Smithsonian Collection of Recordings: The Jazz Singers* (Sony, 1998 5CD). This collection does not include Adelaide Hall, Chris McNulty, Kurt Elling, or Arthur Prysock, the point being lists are arbitrary, may be out-of-date, subjective, and restricted by what the list-maker has access to. One only has to google world's best guitarists and it's astonishing the weird lists that appear. To some it's as if the guitar was invented in 1989 and used exclusively by so-called white "rock and roll" players. My list is fuelled by curiosity about the enchantment, mystery, beauty of one song by one singer over other songs by the same singer, or the delicious sounds of one singer over most other singers regardless of content. It is entirely personal based on my ownership of music documents. Chet Baker is neither on the Smithsonian list nor mine. Fats Waller intoned "God is in the house" when Art Tatum fronted up to a Waller gig. That term really applies to Louis Armstrong, when any consideration of jazz is entered into, but especially so when it comes to voice and the influence of Armstrong on popular song.

My first memorable encounter with Louis Armstrong was on hearing him sing *That's My Desire* (Kresa/Loveday) in a version recorded 19th March, 1947. Frankie Laine had a hit with the song in 1946. It featured on the concert *Satchmo at Symphony Hall* with Jack Teagarden, Barney Bigard, Dick Cary, Arvell Shaw, and Big Sid Catlett backing Louis and Velma Middleton in a comedic take on it. Louis sang:

*To spend one night with yooooooooo
In our old rendezvooooooooo
And reminisce with yooooooooo
That's my desiiiiiyerrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr*

It echoes still.



In the beginning there was *Heebie Jeebies* (B Atkins) 26/2/26 with Armstrong, cornet and vocal; Kid Ory, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Lil Armstrong, piano; and Johnny St Cyr, banjo. Louis sings the whole lyric and then scats (a New Orleans tradition) for the first time by anyone on record. It was a revelation. *Skit-Dat-De-Dat* (Hardin), *Gut Bucket Blues* (Armstrong), and *Cornet Chop Suey* (Armstrong), also featured Armstrong's voice in a landmark series of recordings known as *The Complete Hot Five & Hot Seven Recordings*. Composers such as Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers were horrified by Armstrong's embellishments, indeed transformations, but George Gershwin, Harold Arlen and especially Hoagy Carmichael were delighted. A number of Carmichael's songs became standard repertoire for Armstrong including *(Up A) Lazy River* (Carmichael/Arodin, 1930); a definitive version of *Georgia On My Mind* (Carmichael/Gorrell) and *Rockin' Chair* (Carmichael, 1929). Carmichael was influenced by Bix Beiderbecke and Louis Armstrong and one of the greatest songs, *Stardust* (Carmichael/Parish, 1928), was inspired by the intricate phrases, style and spirit of Beiderbecke, making it a melodically complex but beautiful standard. Its bittersweet tone has appealed to many accomplished jazz artists: Goodman, Chu Berry, Shaw, Coltrane, Brubeck, Tormé, Jacki Byard and Bing Crosby among them. But Armstrong's version remains one of the finest in recorded jazz.

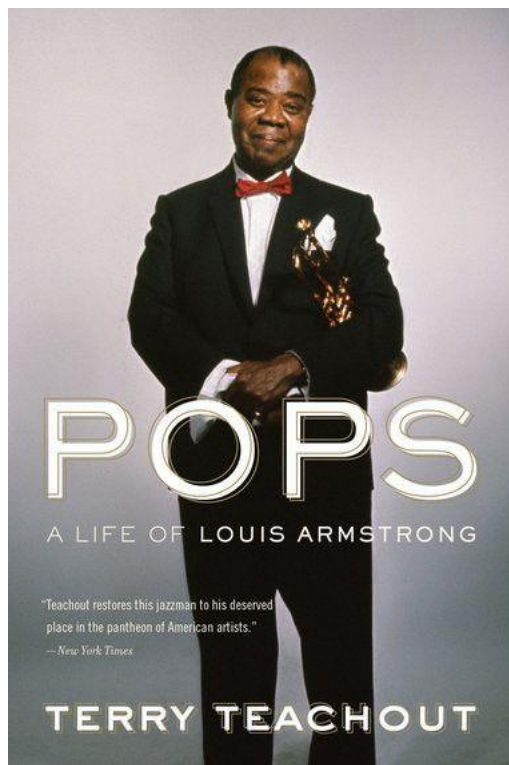


Armstrong (left): his version of "Stardust" remains one of the finest in recorded jazz... PHOTO CREDIT HERMAN LEONARD

Okeh's producer Tommy Rockwell pushed Armstrong to record pop songs, as he had not yet achieved "true fame":

*Between September of 1929 and the end of 1930, Armstrong recorded 28 different songs in 18 different recording sessions, all but two with big-band accompaniment and many issued as both race records and as part of Okeh's regular line, meaning that they would also be distributed to stores in white neighbourhoods... Most of the songs he sang, then and for the next few years, became standards that continue to be performed today - it was Armstrong who introduced them into the repertory - and some, like Body And Soul (Green/Heyman/Sour/Eyton) were harmonically complex to a degree that would have defeated most of his New Orleans contemporaries.**

Armstrong's breakthrough record was *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* (McHugh/Fields) 1929, performed at a very slow tempo. It was a breakthrough in the sense too that it was a rarity for a black artist to perform a popular song. Ethel Waters had sung it but without the "African retention" that Armstrong displayed. His recording of *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Waller/Razaf) of 19/7/29 backed by *Black And Blue* (Waller/Brooks/Razaf) was his first real hit. His richly melancholy 1931 version of *When Your Lover Has Gone* (Swan) - which is one of my favourite vocals of all - was hugely influential for so-called crooners such as Sinatra, Prima, Damone, Bennett, Martin, and Como.



*Terry Teachout, "Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong", Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, NY, 2009, p 141.

In this Italian/American connection, there is something of music coming full circle, as Armstrong was a fan of opera and said: "I had Caruso records... and Henry Burr, Galli-Curci, Tetrizzini - they were all my favourites. Then there was the Irish tenor, McCormack - beautiful phrasing".*

Louis also acknowledged Bing Crosby as an influence. Crosby had been influenced by Armstrong and was becoming the most famous pop singer in America. Crosby stated in 1950 that Armstrong was the "beginning and end of music in America." Armstrong in turn aspired to Crosby's lyricism and recorded three of his signature tunes: *I Surrender Dear* (Barris/Clifford); *Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams* (Barris/Koehler/Moll) and *Stardust* (Carmichael/Parrish).



Bing Crosby (left) had been influenced by Armstrong (right) and was becoming the most famous pop singer in America...

Richard Sudhalter, the composer's biographer, called Armstrong's take on *Stardust*:

*Quoted in notes to "Artist As A Young Man: 1932-1934" (Sony) 1994, Dan Morgenstern p 32).

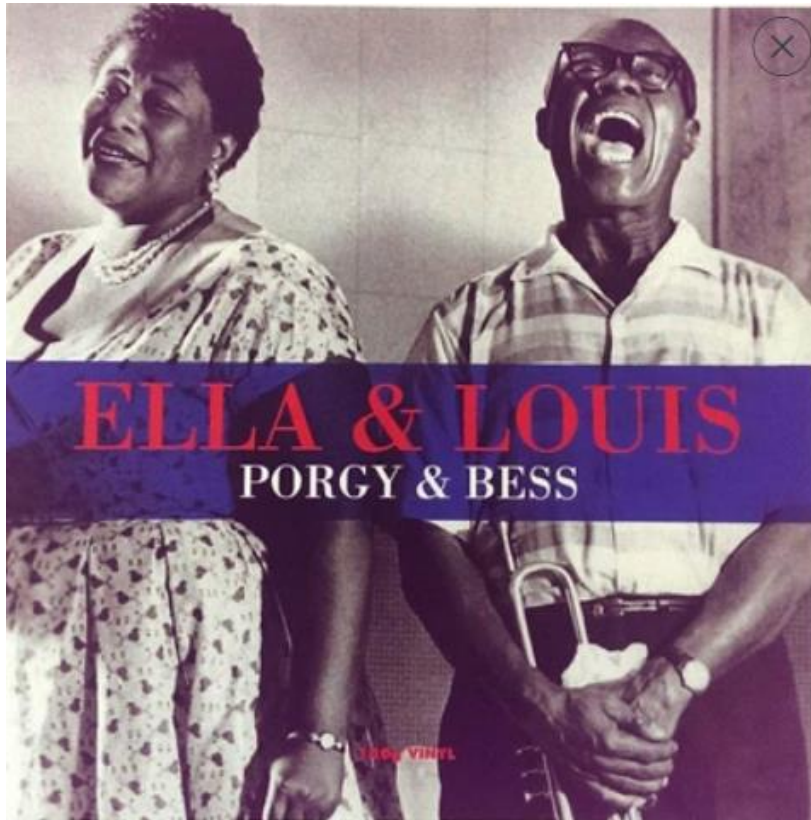
*a singular, and incomparable, event... It is an aria, trumpet and vocal proceeding from the same broadly operatic conception, at once a transfiguration of Carmichael's melody and a reaffirmation of its hot jazz origins.... It does no disservice to two exemplary trumpet choruses to suggest that the performance's most startling feature lies in its vocal... Armstrong attenuates, foreshortens, extends and compresses, words and entire phrases, sometimes almost into incomprehensibility - only to emerge with a dramatic impact far greater and more immediate than Parish's lyric, however manifold its virtues, could ever have dreamt of attuning.**

Armstrong's vocal is a paraphrase of both tune and lyric: *soetimesIwonderwhyIspendsuchlonelynight (oh, baby, lonely nighnnnnmmmm) / Drreaming of a song(melody/memory)/And I am once again with you.* Although Louis' vocal recordings around the period 1929-1933 are a magnificent highlight of voice recordings which revolutionised both jazz singing and popular music, perhaps all music for voice, he enjoyed another golden period under the auspices of Norman Granz. The duet records of *Ella and Louis* (1956) and *Ella and Louis Again* (1957) as well as *Porgy and Bess* (1957) on Granz's Verve label, are much loved examples of two of the great jazz voices.



Ella and Louis (1956) and (over the page) Ella & Louis: Porgy & Bess: much loved examples of two of the great jazz voices...

**Pops, ibid, p 173.*



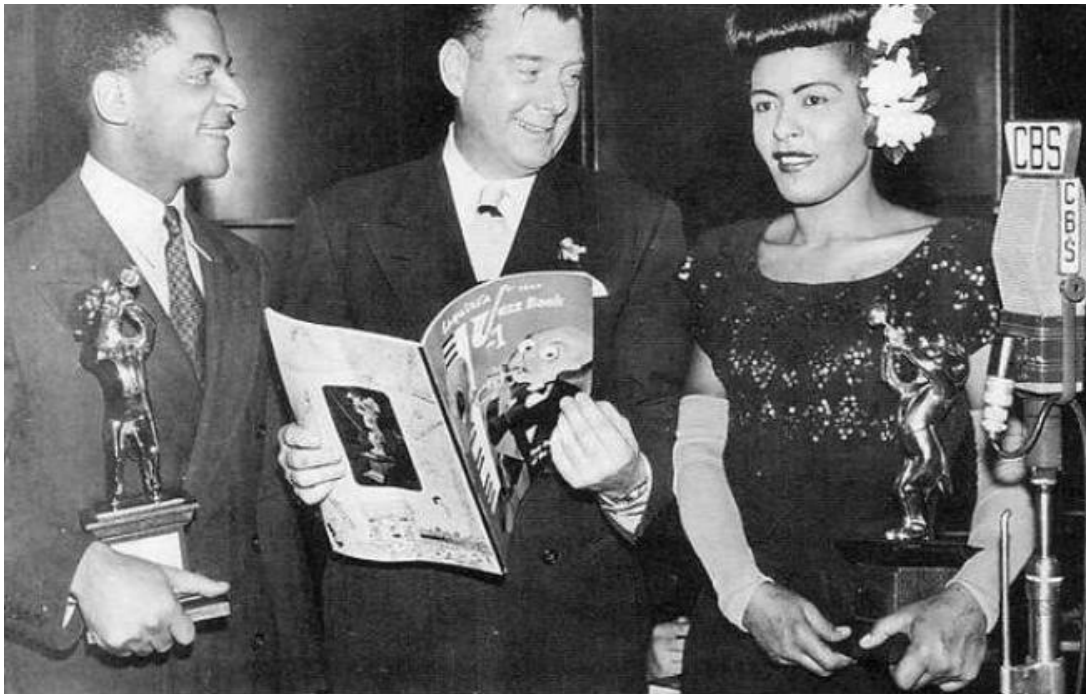
Billie Holiday is much loved by jazz enthusiasts, the gay community, feminists, African Americans and a broad range of music lovers who see her as *the* tragic voice of womanhood, as well as the “truest” jazz singer of all and the voice of the oppressed, as opposed to the sunny voice of Ella or the “sassy” attitude and operatic voice of Sarah Vaughan.



Billie Holiday: many see her as the tragic voice of womanhood as well as the “truest” jazz singer of all, and the voice of the oppressed...

In musical terms there is general agreement that, when it comes to lyrics, she is unsurpassed. She packs a greater wallop, more meaning and feeling into “*Lover man, oh, where can you be?*” than any other singer and any other sometimes banal lyric such as “*I know it's wrong, it must be wrong, But right or wrong I can't get along without you*” (from *I'm A Fool To Want You* (Sinatra/Wolf/Herron)). She did not scat. Words had meaning to her. She said: “*I don't think I'm singing. I feel like I'm playing the horn. I try to improvise like Les Young, or Louis Armstrong, or someone else I admire. What comes out is what I feel. I hate straight singing. I have to change a tune to my own way of doing it. That's all I know*”.*

Her finest recordings may be those with the Teddy Wilson band in the 1930s though the much loved 10CD document *The Complete Billie Holiday On Verve, 1945-1959*, complete with multiple studio chit chat no less.



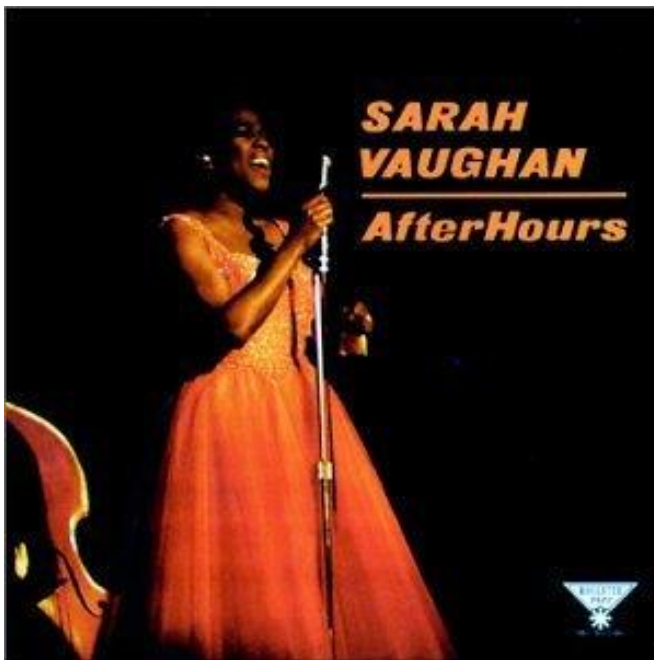
Teddy Wilson (left & Billie Holiday (right) receiving their Esquire awards from Arthur Godfrey in New York, January 13, 1947... PHOTO CREDIT AVALON ARCHIVES

My first encounter with Sarah Vaughan was with the album *Sarah Vaughan in Hi Fi* with the following musicians featured on eight of the tracks, overseen by Vaughan's husband George Treadwell: Miles Davis, trumpet; Bennie Green, trombone; Budd Johnson, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Jones, piano; Freddie Green and Mundell Lowe, guitars; Tony Scott, clarinet; Billy Taylor Sr, bass; and J C Heard on drums. In retrospect the sound of the music and Vaughan's approach was much affected by the ethereal sounds of Davis and especially

*Quoted in “*Oxford Companion To Jazz*”, *ibid*, p 247.

Tony Scott. The music was recorded 1949-1950. *It Might As Well Be Spring* (Rodgers & Hammerstein); *Can't Get Out of This Mood* (Frank Loesser and Jimmy McHugh) and *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Waller/Razaf/Brooks/Donaldson) were highlights.

Sarah Vaughan “had the richness, range, power, and control to project operatic arias”.* Vaughan had hit pop records such as *Eternally* (Chaplin/Parsons/Turner) but she will be remembered as one of the finest artists in music for a range of documents including her *After Hours* album, backed just by guitar and bass.



For many jazz lovers the trilogy of vocalists who performed with the trumpet player Clifford Brown in 1954 are one of the high points of recorded voice. Dinah Washington, Helen Merrill, and Sarah Vaughan produced some of their best works in these documents - proof, perhaps, that as another instrument they rose to the level of their colleagues, given the opportunity to do so. Their colleagues included Clifford Brown, trumpet; Harold Land, tenor; Richie Powell, piano; George Morrow, bass; and Max Roach, drums. The stars truly aligned when Sarah Vaughan sang some memorable melodies in December 1954 in New York backed by Brown; Herbie Mann, flute; Paul Quinichette, tenor; Jimmy Jones, piano; Joe Benjamin, bass; and Roy Haynes, drums, with arrangements by Ernie Wilkins who conducted. Vaughan's interpretations of *Jim* (Rose/Petrillo/Shawn), *He's My Guy* (Raye/Paul) and *You're Not The Kind* (Hudson/Mills) have rarely been if ever surpassed. One of my personal favourite memories of Vaughan is her lower register sound in her version of *Send In The Clowns* (Sondheim), which she recorded in 1974 aged 50. Unbelievably beautiful.

*Patricia Willard, "Oxford Jazz", *ibid*, p243.

For live performance I've been thrilled by inter alia Betty Carter, Mark Murphy, Chris McNulty and Renee Geyer, but nothing came close to Wangaratta on Saturday 29th October, 2011, with Gian Slater accompanied by Linda May Han Oh on acoustic bass, in an hour recital of works from the Great American Song Book. Unforgettable. Tears of joy.



Nothing came close to Saturday 29th October 2011 at Wangaratta: Gian Slater (above) accompanied by Linda May Han Oh (below) on acoustic bass in an hour recital of works from the Great American Song Book. Unforgettable. Tears of joy...

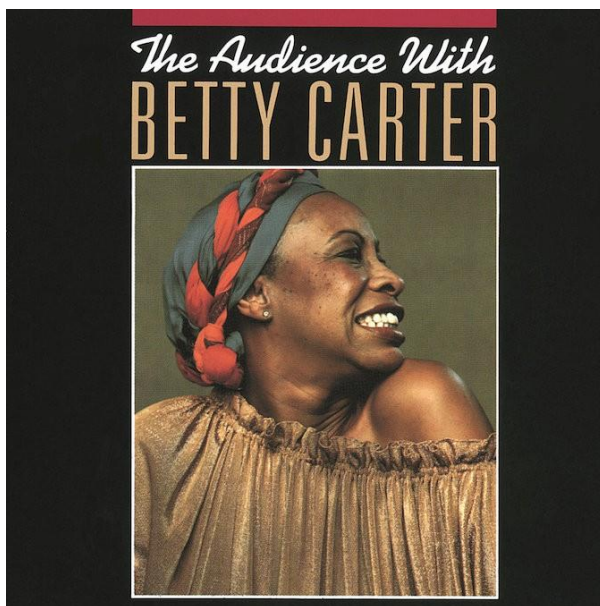


Some major documents of recorded voice include:

Ella Fitzgerald Sings the George and Ira Gershwin Songbook, music arranged and conducted by Nelson Riddle (Verve) Recorded Capitol Studios, 1959.

Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong Cheek to Cheek: The Complete Duet Recordings (Verve) 2017 includes recordings from the Bing Crosby Chesterfield Show (1940s), *The Decca Singles*, *Ella And Louis*, *Ella and Louis Again*, and *Porgy and Bess*.

The Audience With Betty Carter (Verve, 1988) iconic live album by one who re-invents standards such as *The Trolley Song* (Martin/Blane) and *My Favourite Things* (Rodgers/Hammerstein) but performs her 25-minute own composition *Sounds*, revealing her improvisational chops.



Anthony Braxton GTM (Syntax, 2017), 12CD of 12 voices navigating 12 compositions by Braxton each approximately 55 minutes long.

Ambitious but emotionally remote experimental polyphony with a resemblance more to Terry Riley and Steve Reich than Louis Armstrong.

Lady Day: The Complete Billie Holiday on Columbia 1933–1944 10-disc compilation of the complete known studio master recordings, plus alternate takes. No scating but gives power and meaning to sometimes banal lyrics. Grammy Award Best Historical Album.

Frank Sinatra: The Capitol Years 1953-62 (Big 12, 2014). Taught to breathe by Tommy Dorsey, best jazz influenced popular vocalist.

Anita O'Day, The Verve Years: A Collection of Her Finest Verve Recordings 1957-1962. Sunny, hip and rhythmic delight.

Louis Armstrong: Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man 1923-1934, Columbia/Legacy 1994. A judicious selection including some of his greatest vocals.

The Mel Tormé Collection 1944-1985 Rhino 1996. Tormé was involved in this selection from his golden era. Artie Shaw, Sonny Burke, Les Baxter, Frank De Vol, Pete Rugolo, Marty Paich, Bill May are some of the bands involved.

The Jazz Singers: A Smithsonian Collection of Jazz Vocals from 1919-1994, Sony, 1998. 5CD.

The Essential Bessie Smith (Columbia/Legacy) 1997. Hugely influential. Some have reckoned Bessie is the most honest vocalist ever.

Favourite recordings:

Sheila Jordan on *Better Than Anything: Live* (2015) There (Label), with a medley of *You'd Be So Nice To Come To* (Porter); *Mourning Song* (Sheila Jordan); *Japanese Dream* (Clifford Jordan); and *What'll I Do?* (Irving Berlin) backed by Harvie Swartz, bass and Alan Broadbent, piano, where she goes from up-tempo standard, to wordless, to ballad, to standard ballad, navigating with aplomb within a limited range but showing her ability to scat, vocalise, and invest a lyric with real poetry. Entranced by Charlie Parker, educated by Lennie Tristano, married to Duke Jordan.

Sheila Jordan singing *The Saga of Harrison Crabfeather* (Kuhn) backed only by bassist Arild Andersen who follows the opening verse with a superb solo, recorded 27/8/77 (Steeplechase, 1985). Just two instruments: bass and voice. 30 years later Chris McNulty included this song on her fine album *Eternal* (2015).



Sheila Jordan (centre) at 89 receiving her doctorate of fine arts in 2017. Born in 1928 in dire poverty, and the only singer taught by Lennie Tristano, she was the first singer recorded by Blue Note... PHOTO COURTESY IAN MULDOON

Again, just two instruments, this time the drums of Max Roach and the voice of wife Abbey Lincoln on *Prayer/Protest/Peace* (Roach) 6/9/60 from *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*. Max Roach with Booker Little, trumpet; Julian Priester, trombone; Walter Benton, Coleman Hawkins, tenor sax; James Schenck, bass; Michael Olatunji, congas; Ray Mantilla, and Thomas DuVall, percussion.

Always (Berlin) sung by Sarah Vaughan at her sweetest and Billy Eckstine at his most convincing, plus beautiful harmony - pure magic ballad - from *The Irving Berlin Songbook* (1957). Hal Mooney Orchestra arranged and conducted by Mooney.

Chris McNulty with Ugonna Okegwo, bass; Marcus Gilmore, bass and Paul Bollenback, guitars, singing *How Are Things In Glocca Morra* (Lane/Harburg) from her album *The Song That Sings You Here* (2012).

My Funny Valentine (Rodgers/Hart) sung by Arthur Prysock (1965) as it should be sung: 2'30" once through, deep, dark brilliance.

The blues *Goin' To Chicago* (Basie/Rushing) was made famous by Jimmy Rushing and Count Basie in their Okeh recording of 17th November 1941. It was distinguished by an opening chorus by Buck Clayton on trumpet. Joe Williams recorded it before an audience on August 7, 1973 at Fantasy Studios. It is given a stunning reprise by two of the great jazz singers, one older and one younger in a live performance in Chicago: Jon Hendricks and Kurt Elling, on Elling's *Live In Chicago* (1999). In beautiful synchronicity it was recorded in Chicago at The Green Mill Jazz Club in July 1999. At this performance Jon Hendricks introduces the piece as an "anthem". In the performance Kurt Elling vocalises Buck Clayton's original opening chorus. *Goin' To Chicago* is sung in duet conversation against the backing of just bass player Rob Amster. It is a marvellous example of the old being given a fresh and exciting reworking. Kurt Elling said, "The male jazz voice is devalued because there's no church singing anymore, not as a norm, and no school singing, and the popular culture has gone in a different direction. But that doesn't trouble me and nor does the suggestion that I'm first in a field of one. I want to communicate, and not just to five people in a club with a bad piano. This music deserves more than that."

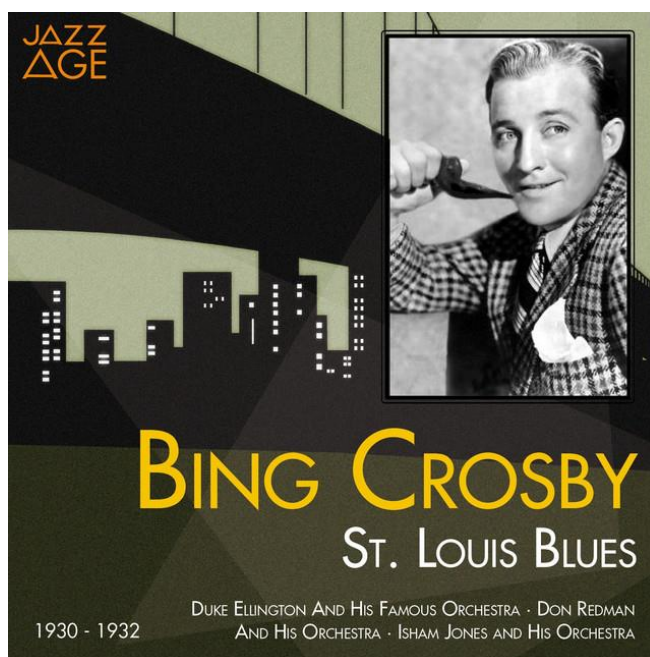


Kristin Berardi's take on *Young At Heart* (Richards/Leigh) in a sweet little-girlish tone as a wistful ballad, with fine solos by acoustic bassist Sam Anning and fine support by piano and guitar: "Fairy tales can come true, It can happen to you if you're young at heart", with perhaps a touch of irony as it was a major hit for the "heartthrob" woman's man and rat pack organiser Frank Sinatra, famous for calling an Australian journalist just another "broad". From Berardi's *Where Or When* (ABC 2015), with Steve Newcomb, piano; James Sherlock, guitar; Julien Wilson, tenor sax; and Sam Anning, bass.



Vocalist Kristen Berardi (right), pictured here with bassist Sam Anning: note the sweet little-girlish tone in her take on "Young At Heart"...

Bing Crosby's *St Louis Blues* (Handy) 11/2/32 with Duke Ellington and his Orchestra, featuring Cootie Williams, trumpet; Joe Nanton, trombone; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Johnny Hodges, alto sax; and Duke Ellington, piano; restored to very fine digital stereo from 78 rpm originals by Robert Parker 1986 for ABC Records.



Louis Armstrong recorded *When You're Smiling* (Fisher/Goodwin/Shay) a number of times once without voice (11/9/29) when his concluding chorus in the upper register floats the melody over the band in a way that would make the angels weep. But his voice recording of it at a slow tempo (120 bpm) on the 26/11/29 makes me weep with its poignancy and countertone to the words. "Un bel di, vedremo" from *Madam Butterfly* seems melodramatic and strained in comparison.

In a similar way Billie Holiday, singing *What A Little Moonlight Will Do* (Woods) December, 1933 with Teddy Wilson and his Orchestra, counter intuitively perhaps, owing to her tragic power with many songs, not least *Strange Fruit* (Meerpool), never ceases to move me to delight in her apparent joy and sweetness. But on *Strange Fruit*.....

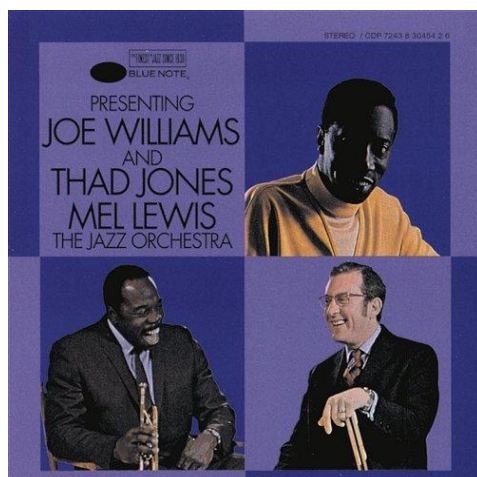
Lucia Cadotsch does a largo *Strange Fruit* (Allen) on her *Speak Low* (2016, Enja), along with eight other classic songs, with just Otis Sandsjo on tenor and Petter Eldh on bass. It's a very accomplished and satisfying 7' of three fine "voices" and an example perhaps of how a young singer can bring authenticity to music far removed from her own experience. The arco bass by Petter Eldh and expressive tenor on *Strange Fruit* is potent stuff. Truly a trio effort.

Sweet Lorraine (Burwell/Parish) Nat King Cole piano, arranger, voice with John Collins, guitar; and Charles P Harris, bass 22/3/61 in New York.

Paper Doll (Black 1915) by the Mills Brothers recorded 1943. Impossible to forget their harmony on the third run through of the verse.

Linda Sharrock on *Soon* (*Linda Sharrock*) with Sonny Sharrock, guitar; Beb Guérin, bass; and Jacques Thollot, drums; from album *Monkey-Pockie-Boo* (BYG) Paris, 22/6/70.

Joe Williams singing *Evil Man Blues* (Feather/Hampton) September, 1966 backed by the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, Blue Note 1994. "I'm an evil man, and don't you bother with me, I'm an evil man, don't you bother with me, 'Cause I'll empty your pockets and fill you with misery", and then women fall at his feet in wonder at the voice. The song was written for Hot Lips Page in 1941 by Leonard Feather and Lionel Hampton. Williams makes it his own.



Duke Ellington once said: "Jazz is music, Swing is business". He yearned to escape the three-minute pop song, or at least the limitations imposed by three minutes recordings. *Cotton Tail* (Ellington) features one of Webster's best solos, and also one of the greatest ever recorded. Gunther Schuller writes that Webster's solo

*finds a remarkable balance between a whole world of musical ideas: swinging eight-note phrases interspersed with long and expressive held notes, some of these embellished with passionate vibratos and shakes, tonal colorations ranging from soft hues to hot and raspy timbres, all a rich mixture of the predictable and unpredictable. To the listener, it comes across as a solo of remarkable logic and craft, deviating from the established changes, yet melodically making sense. It has become a cliché to say that a solo tells a story, but Webster achieves just that: a commanding introduction, the development of key phrases, the build to a climax, all of which has a distinct narrative quality to it. Surprisingly, it was nailed in one take.**



*Duke Ellington,
pictured in 1927:
Jazz is music,
Swing is
business...PHOTO
COURTESY
PINTEREST*

**Dave Rickert, All About Jazz.com, 10/2/05.*

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross on their *Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Sing Ellington* Columbia Reissue (1996) do a vocalese of the original *Cottontail* with Hendricks replicating Webster's solo. *Cottontail* is one of the great swing numbers, ironically!

Ivie Anderson on *Truckin'* (Koehler/Bloom) 19/8/35 with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Solos by Ben Webster (tenor), Cootie Williams (trumpet) and Joe Nanton (trombone) along with some brilliant swinging ensemble phrasing, propels this "song" into masterpiece.

Mark Murphy singing *Out Of This World* (Arlen/McHugh/Mercer) with inter alia Clark Terry, trumpet; Jimmy Cleveland, trombone; Bill Evans, piano; Art Davis, bass; and Jimmy Cobb drums, arranged and conducted by Ernie Wilkins from the album *Rah* (Riverside) 1961.



Mark Murphy, pictured here in 1975...

Peggy Lee did *Where or When* (Rodgers & Hart) with Benny Goodman, clarinet; Lou McGarity and Cutty Cutshall, trombones; Mel Powell, piano and arranger; Tommy Morgan, guitar; Sid Weiss, bass; and Ralph Collier, drums; on 24th December 1941 two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbour. One can only wonder what is going through the hearts and minds of those artists during this recording, but the rendition seems immensely potent in its restrained power.

Eddie Jefferson, who invented vocalese, *Bless My Soul Parker's Mood* (Jefferson/Parker) 1949 is my favourite of his.

Without A Song (Youmans/Rose/Eliscu) by Billy Eckstine, who recorded it in 1946, and 1961 live in Las Vegas on *No Cover No Minimum*, (Blue Note Reissue 1992). Interesting to compare Sinatra's somewhat insipid version with Eckstine's which packs a wallop, and gives the lyrics real meaning. Jimmy Scott gives it a fine treatment too.



Billy Eckstine: his version of "Without A Song" packs a wallop... PHOTO CREDIT HERMAN LEONARD

Round, Round, Round (Blue Rondo a la Turk) (Brubeck/Jarreau) by New York Voices, vocalese lyrics by Lauren Kinhan, solos by Kim Nazarian and Lauren Kinhan in the tradition of the Boswell Sisters through to Lambert/Hendricks/Ross. A great reworking of the Brubeck tune - glorious harmony, intriguing rhythms and delightful melody - from *Reminiscing In Tempo* (Origin, 2019). Also see Manhattan Transfer or the Andrews Sisters and *Tuxedo Junction* (Hawkins/Feyne/Johnson/Julian Dash).